

Health Bulletin

Medicines, Foods with Health Claims and Vitamins

October 17–23 is “**Medicine and Health Week**” every year.**Medicines:** Used to treat and prevent disease.**Quasi-drugs:** Used to prevent disease and maintain hygiene. They contain active ingredients approved by Japan’s Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) at specified concentrations, but act mildly on the body. Examples include medicated cosmetics and toothpaste.

Amendments to Japan’s Act on Securing Quality, Efficacy and Safety of Products Including Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices (PMD Act)

Effective May 1, 2026

1. Revised sales rules for drugs requiring guidance

Category	Prescription medicines	Over-the-counter medicines				
		Medicines recently switched from prescription to OTC status	Specified drugs requiring guidance (new)	Drugs requiring guidance	Class 1 OTC	Class 2 OTC
Where to buy	Pharmacy	Pharmacies and licensed medicine retailers (e.g., drugstores)				
How to buy	In person / online	In person	In person / online			
Professional providing support	Pharmacist				Pharmacist or registered seller	
Support at purchase	Medication guidance (required)	Information (required)			Information (best efforts duty)	Consultation

New category: “Specified drugs requiring guidance”

In principle, purchasers must meet a pharmacist in person at a pharmacy where a pharmacist is present. Detailed written information and guidance are required. Example: Emergency contraceptive pills (levonorgestrel).

Medicines Q&A



Q1. Does taking more make a medicine work better?

Taking more does not improve the effect and may cause side effects or poisoning. **Always follow the dosage and directions.**

Stopping a medicine on your own because your symptoms have improved may cause a relapse or prevent full recovery. If symptoms improve before the prescribed course ends, consult your doctor or pharmacist.

Q2. Can I give my medicine to someone else?

Doctors prescribe medicines for each person’s illness, symptoms, constitution and age. Even if someone has similar symptoms, **do not share your prescribed medicine** with them.

Q3. Is keeping medicines out of children’s reach enough?

Keep medicines out of reach. Medicines and quasi-drugs account for **16.8%** of accidental ingestions by children. Children may use a step stool to reach them, so consider a **locked storage area**.

Be especially careful with psychotropic medicines, bronchodilators, blood pressure medicines and blood glucose lowering medicines, which can cause severe poisoning. If a child accidentally swallows medicine, check their condition, the medicine’s name and amount taken. Contact a specialist service or seek medical care.

I get medicines from several hospitals.
Are they safe to take together?

Which over-the-counter medicine
should I choose at the pharmacy?

It is not working well.
Can I increase the dose?

For any questions about
medicines, ask your regular
pharmacist or pharmacy.



2. Stricter sales rules for designated medicines to prevent misuse

Overdoses of over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, sometimes promoted on social media, have become a concern. The category formerly called “medicines at risk of abuse” is now “**designated medicines to prevent misuse**.”

Affected ingredients (* = newly added)

Ephedrine
Dihydrocodeine
Pseudoephedrine
* Dextromethorphan

Codeine
Bromovalerylurea
Methylephedrine
* Diphenhydramine

May be found in cold,
cough, allergy or
headache medicines

Age limit: In principle, sales of large packs or multiple packs to people under 18 are prohibited.

Display rules: Store in locked cabinets or behind the counter, or display empty boxes only.

Checks and records: Confirm the buyer’s name, age (using ID) and purchases at other stores. Stores must prepare and properly retain procedures and supporting check records.

“Kosei Rodo” magazine: Are You Using Medicines Correctly?
Common mistakes and misunderstandings about medicines

MHLW web magazine: Using medicines safely

Accidental ingestion: Advice

Pediatric telephone consultation

Contact: **#8000** Nationwide short code. Connects to your prefecture’s service.

Japan Poison Information Center (public)

Contact:

Osaka Poison 110 (24 hours, every day)

☎ 072-727-2499

Tsukuba Poison 110 (24 hours, every day)

☎ 029-852-9999

Information is free of charge.

History of Japan's health food systems

Research from 1984 to 1986 led to the concept of foods with function claims.
In April 2015, Japan introduced the Foods with Function Claims system to increase the choice of products with clear claims and help consumers choose using accurate information.



Look for the distinctive FOSHU approval mark!

Foods for Specified Health Uses (FOSHU)

Scientific evidence supports the health benefits of these foods. The government reviews their claimed effects and safety, and the Commissioner of the CAA **authorizes each product individually**.

Labels display an approval mark and the approved claim.
As of April 18, 2023, 1,065 products had received authorization or approval.

Example label claims:
"Helps maintain normal blood glucose, blood pressure or cholesterol"
"Helps regulate bowel function"
"Supports bone health"



Foods with Function Claims (FFC)

Businesses take responsibility for function claims based on scientific evidence. Before sale, they submit information on safety and evidence supporting the claimed functions to the Commissioner of the Consumer Affairs Agency (CAA).

These foods do not undergo individual review by the CAA.

Claims unavailable under FOSHU may be used, such as skin hydration or visual function.

More than 7,000 notifications had been submitted by the end of May 2023.

Foods with Nutrient Function Claims (FNFC)

These foods can supplement nutrients, such as vitamins and minerals, that may be insufficient in the daily diet.

If a food contains an established nutrient within the prescribed range, it may carry the government's standard wording about that nutrient's function without a separate notification.

Labels state "Foods with Nutrient Function Claims (name of nutrient)."



Search by the notification number or notified claim to find detailed information on safety and the claimed functions.

CAA: Understanding Food Labels

[MHLW / National Institutes of Biomedical Innovation, Health and Nutrition](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisaku/seisaku_00001.html)
"Health Foods": Safety and Effectiveness Information

Check information on the safety and effectiveness in humans of ingredients that interest you.

Vitamin Types and Deficiency Diseases

Solubility	Vitamin	Deficiency disease	Foods rich in the vitamin
Fat-soluble	Vitamin A	Night blindness	Egg yolk, butter, carrots, pumpkin, eel
	Vitamin D	Rickets, osteomalacia	Liver, milk, shiitake mushrooms, fish (sardines, bonito, saury)
	Vitamin E	Hemolytic anemia	Wheat germ, brown rice, green leafy vegetables
	Vitamin K	Liver disorders, delayed blood clotting	Green and yellow vegetables, natto
Water-soluble	Vitamin B1	Beriberi	Rice germ, brown rice, soybeans, barley, yeast
	Vitamin B2	Stomatitis, conjunctivitis	Milk, egg yolk, liver, spinach
	Vitamin B6	Stomatitis, dermatitis, peripheral neuritis	Fish, liver, corn
	Vitamin B12	Pernicious anemia	Liver, seafood, milk
	Niacin	Pellagra	Liver, soybeans, milk, seaweed
	Vitamin C	Scurvy	Green and yellow vegetables, fruit, green tea

Dietary Reference Intakes for Japanese (2025 edition)

Adequate intake of vitamin D for adults aged 18 and over, both sexes: **8.5 µg/day to 9.0 µg/day**

UV Light and Vitamin D

1. Key roles of vitamin D

- 1) Helps the body absorb calcium and maintain strong bones.
- 2) Essential for the immune system to fight invading bacteria and viruses.

2. Vitamin D sources



- 1) We obtain vitamin D from food and make it in the skin through exposure to ultraviolet light from the sun.
- 2) Many people depend on sunlight for **more than half** of the vitamin D they need.

5. How much sunlight is needed to make vitamin D?

You may wonder how many minutes of sunlight are enough. The answer varies with location, season, time of day, weather, clothing, skin color (skin type) and age. There is no single recommended duration that applies to everyone.

Reference: Sunlight exposure times in Sapporo, Tsukuba (Ibaraki) and Naha (Okinawa), in July and December, by time of day, needed to produce **5.5 µg (220 IU)** of vitamin D.

Location	July (noon)	December (noon)
Sapporo	4.6	76.4
Tsukuba	3.5	22.4
Naha	2.9	7.5

Vitamin D increases intestinal calcium absorption by about 2 to 5 times.



Important!

Vitamin D is plentiful in fish and mushrooms, but most other foods contain little. Few people obtain enough from food alone.

